



In Motion

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The impact of physical fitness on readiness

by Diana Settles

As the nation celebrated National Employee Health and Fitness Day May 19, people attending the Health Fair at the NAS Oceana Fitness and Sports Center reflected on the impact that physical fitness has on our warfighter community.

A primary goal for physical fitness is achieving and maintaining a fit and ready operational force. In order to accomplish this goal, the Navy provides state-of-the-art fitness centers and equipment, fitness professionals, command fitness leaders, health promotion professionals and the semi-annual Physical Readiness Test.

Why is exercise important to Navy readiness?

Sailors may actually use the same muscular strength and endurance, aerobic functions, balance, coordination and flexibility they use when exercising as they do during their day-to-day jobs in the Navy.

Exercise Improves Energy Levels

Participating in a regular fitness program will improve energy, decrease fatigue, and help Sailors to fall sleep better. It is operationally important for Sailors to be able to maintain alertness on the job – especially if they are working in high-risk areas such as the flight deck. Many times the safety of everyone falls into the hands of a few Sailors operating controls for several hours. They must stay alert!

Exercise Improves Job Performance

Muscular and aerobic fitness allows a Sailor to perform both strength and endurance job-related activities with more flexibility, with less fatigue and more efficiently. In addition, being muscularly fit assists in decreasing the chances of incurring injury during tactical or operational activities, during training, sports and recreational activities, and ergonomic-related activities such as lifting or moving heavy objects.

Performing flexibility exercises daily also can improve job performance and reduce the chance of injury. It also makes the body feel better after a long day of work. For example, an aviation machinist's mate may work on an aircraft for more than eight hours a day. During the workday, this Sailor's abdominal area may be in a bent or flexed state for many hours during the day. This causes the stomach muscles to remain contracted for extended amounts of time throughout much of the day. After working in a flexed state for several hours, a good abdominal stretching routine makes the body feel better, and stretching the lower back and the hamstring muscles in the back of the thigh area will help make the back feel better and feel less tight or tense.

Exercise Decreases Stress

Physical activity also helps to reduce stress. Learning to cope with stress is an important part of healthy living and is an important component for operational readiness. Family problems, financial problems, deployment issues, conflicts



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with friends or shipmates, and job pressures can cause stress. Major life changes such as divorce, or leaving family for a deployment are also sources of stress. Exercise helps by causing physical changes inside your body that help it to better handle stress.

Other benefits of Physical Activity

There are several other very important short-

term and long-term benefits of physical activity. Individuals who exercise regularly are more likely to:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Improve mood; release tension
- Improve mental fitness – ability to focus and concentrate
- Effectively control the pain and joint swelling that accompanies arthritis
- Maintain lean muscle, which is often lost with increasing age
- Have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence; improved self-image
- Continue to perform activities of daily living as they get older
- Experience overall feelings of well-being and good health
- Have enhanced military bearing

Also, people who exercise regularly are less likely to develop heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, certain forms of cancer and osteoporosis.

Looking youthful is an appealing benefit of physical activity. Exercise helps to keep the body's metabolism (the rate at which the body burns calories) working effectively. Calories are burned more effectively, and the extra weight people normally gain as they get older is minimized. By participating in a regular exercise program the body will maintain a higher metabolic rate. In addition, nutrients are delivered more effectively to the skin and hair, keeping the outer body looking youthful and healthy.



Lt. Cmdr. Dave Baker of VFA 81 performs bicep curls at the Oceana Fitness and Sports Center.

Photo by PH3 Amanda Robinson

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